

Internal Form for Oral History File

This file contains the oral history of: Mary Camozzi

Recorded on: October, 7, 2025

Recorded by: Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba

Recorded in (location): California State Railroad Museum, Big 4 Conference Room

For the Purpose of: Recording the history of families who worked in the Southern Pacific Railroad company and exploring the lives of their children.

Oral History Description

Narrator's Age: XX

Narrator City/State: Sacramento, California

Brief Summary: In this interview, Mary Camozzi, daughter of a former Southern Pacific Railroad foreman, speaks about her parent's relationship and dynamic; her trip to Mexico with her maternal grandmother; how she spent her childhood playing in the railroads; stories of her brother Jesse L. Garica; the type of people and families who lived and worked in the surrounding areas near the railroads; describes the inside of the box car and how they lived in it; stories of family friends; explains the everyday living of railroad life and living in a box car; her relationship with her father; the matriarchal system in her family; how her father sponsored family members and friends; the family customs to respect their elders and cultural clashes; attending church and its community; her mother and their mother daughter relationship; the transition from living in a box car to a suburban home and neighborhood; her 47 year marriage, husband, church involvement, and marital advice.

Subject:

Holding Institution:

Accession Number:

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File camozzi_mary_part1__01_11132025_RR_Tr1 & camozzi_mary_part2_01_11132025_ER summary: In this interview, Mary Camozzi, daughter of a former Southern Pacific Railroad foreman, speaks about her parent's relationship and dynamic; her trip to Mexico with her maternal grandmother; how she spent her childhood playing in the railroads; stories of her brother Jesse L. Garica; the type of people and families who lived and worked in the surrounding areas near the railroads; describes the inside of the boxcar and how they lived in it; stories of family friends; explains the everyday living of railroad life and living in a box car; her relationship with her father; the matriarchal system in her family; how her father sponsored family members and friends; the family customs to respect their elders and cultural clashes; attending church and its community; her mother and their mother daughter relationship; the transition from living in a box car to a suburban home and neighborhood; her 47 year marriage, husband, church involvement, and marital advice.

Interview with Mary Camozzi

Interviewed by: Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba

Transcriber: Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba

[Interview #01: October, 7, 2025]

[Begin Audio File: camozzi_mary_part1__01_11132025_RR_Tr1 & camozzi_mary_part2_01_11132025_ER]

[00:00:00] **Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you so much for coming. I'm really excited to record this oral history with you.

[00:00:07] **Interviewer:** I'm going to be doing the opening transcript, so this is Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba. I am the 2025 - 2026 Oral History Fellow for the California State Railroad Museum, and I'm inter, interviewing Mary Garcia. Today is Tuesday, October 28th, 2025 and it's 11:13. This oral history is being conducted in the Big Four conference room in the California State Railroad Museum. Before we begin this recording, Mary, do I have your permission to record this oral history and the permission of State Parks to publish this transcript in part or its entirety? And you can say yes or no.

[00:00:48] **Mary:** Yes.

[00:00:49] **Interviewer:** Okay, thank you. So the first thing that we're going to be talking about is, can you state your name?

[00:01:00] **Mary:** Mary Camozzi.

[00:01:02] **Interviewer:** Mary Camozzi. And can you tell me where you were born?

[00:01:06] **Mary:** I was born in Sacramento.

[00:01:08] **Interviewer:** And how many siblings do you have?

[00:01:12] **Mary:** How many what?

[00:01:13] **Interviewer:** Siblings.

[00:01:13] **Mary:** Oh, I only have two.

[00:01:15] **Interviewer:** And what, what are their names?

[00:01:16] **Mary:** Oh, two boys. Richard is the youngest and Jesse's the oldest. I'm in the middle.

[00:01:23] **Interviewer:** You're the middle child. And can you tell me who your parents are?

[00:01:28] **Mary:** Jesus and Lucy Garcia.

[00:01:31] **Interviewer:** Okay. We're gonna go into the first question, which is talking about family. So, can you tell me a little bit about your parents? Anything that you would like to share about them.

[00:01:41] **Mary:** Well, ok I have my notes here. [brings up notebook from her lap and proceeds to look toward it as she speaks]

[00:01:44] **Mary:** Well, my dad, I'll start out with my dad. He's very hardworking and he was very big on us kids getting our education. And also, to make sure that we were doing things and knowing about right and wrong and to respect others. And my dad—he worked on the railroad. He was a foreman for the railroad. And he hardly ever took vacation. And if he did, it was either for graduation, funerals. And he—when he did take a vacation it was only for—well, for a couple days and we didn't really go travel. We usually go—went down to my aunt's. If we would lived in Chico we would go from Chico to Sacramento. That's where they—that's where my aunt lived.

[00:02:40] **Mary:** And he knew several languages. I don't know how proficient. Is that a word? He was in the languages of—he could speak English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese. And because his helpers, those were some of the nationalities or nationals that worked with him. And my dad was like I said he was very hardworking person.

[00:03:12] **Mary:** I was a sickly child ¹[laughs]. Sacramento, didn't agree with me [states matter of fact] and so the doctors said, "*You need to take Mary someplace else.*" So from Sacramento we moved to Chico, Thermalito, and I know when I was real little, we lived in Pittsburgh, California. ²

[00:03:39] **Mary:** So anyway, yeah. And my mom, she was very hardworking. She was big on education also. "*You gotta get your education, your education.*" And my mom went to work, well, she worked on the railroad too, and that. She was also a homemaker. I mean—when we kids got older she was a homemaker. And she went to work for the hotels to clean hotels. She cleaned homes and she also got a job for the school. She was a teacher's aide out in the playground. And, my dad didn't really care for her to work, but she told him that, "*You know, the kids are getting older now. They need more, more stuff, more things.*" So he said, you know, he kind of gave in.

[00:04:37] **Mary:** And my mom was—oh [slight laugh] my mom [laugh]. My mom took care of the money. My dad always said, "*It was easier for him, easier for him to find work than to save money.*" So he always—he always gave his paycheck to my mom, and my mom would do whatever she did with it. And where sometimes in the Mexican nationality they, men didn't do that [laughs]. So—but my dad did. And so sometimes my dad would say, "*Oh, you know what, I think I'd like to get a TV or buy something big*" and my mom would say, "*Well, you know what, I think we could do that.*" Because she knew—she knew what she saved and what she spent. So they said, "*Okay*", so one day we got a TV another year or so, we got a brand new car, and so on and so on forth.

¹ Removed section for clarification based on Narrator's notes

² Changed Pittsburgh to California based on Narrator's notes

[00:05:41] **Mary:** Yeah. And. Also, my mom was a, a really good cook. She liked to cook. [crumbling noises heard from notebook] She could go in the refrigerator and just look at stuff and say, "Ooh okay", she pulled out and this and that. And our meals would be consistent of beans, rice, and salad, and sometimes a little bit of meat. And on holidays she made tamales. She made buñuelos. She made turkey. And I know when we lived out in the country, we would get a big old turkey from a farmer. And my grandmother would come over for several weeks and she would feed the turkey rotten tomatoes. And the turkey was named Chacha. And then on Thanksgiving we would eat Chacha [laughs]. So yeah, that was good.

[00:06:48] **Mary:** And uh—what else? [looks down at notebook] Oh, my mom had a sense of humor. My dad would say in Spanish. She—my dad and my mom kind of had pet names, but it would be in Spanish, where in English, it kind of sounds kind of awful. Viejita y viejito which would be like little old lady and little old man [smiles], you know. But, in Spanish it's, it's a dearing thing. And my mom would sometimes get upset with some people or so, and my dad would say, "Viejita", he says, "*Put your guns away. We're going to a fire, not a shootout.*" And she would say, "*All right.*" And then she would kind—he would kind of calm her down, you know, and then.

[00:07:37] **Mary:** Also when my mom liked to cook. My mom would like to, I shouldn't say experiment, but, you know, just cook different things. And my dad would always—my mom would say, "*You know, this, this is something new.*" So, he would try it and if he liked it he would say, "*You know, if you wanted to do, if you wanted to cook this again, it would be good.*" And if he didn't care for it, he never said he didn't like it. He would say, "*If you don't wanna make it again, that's okay with me.*" Where sometimes we have friends that their husbands kind of got kind of rowdy, and if they didn't like something, they would throw it on the floor and that was too bad.

[00:08:29] **Mary:** But my dad and my mom had a really good relationship. They respected each other and they had really good communication. And not only that, with the kids as we were growing up, you would, if we wanted to go someplace, we would ask, well, mom was in charge really 'cause my dad always said, "*Your mom is with you more, longer than I am.*" She says, "*I'm at work. And she's, she's with you. So she has spent more time with you.*" So we would ask Mom if we could do something and if, when she said, "*Go ask your dad*". We knew we weren't going. We'd go see dad and we'd say, "*Dad, can we go this?*" He says, "*What'd your mom say?*" She said, "*To ask you.*" He says, "*Well, go ask your mom again*" and we said, just for, you may as well just forget it. [laughs] Don't even ask. They never said no, they just said, I mean, [laughs] we could play this game for, you know, for forever. So, anyway.

[00:09:33] **Mary:** And, so like I said, my mom and dad had a really good relationship and what have you. And my mom was the oldest of six kids. I don't know how old she was when she came across to the United States—and she—I know she went to school, but she never did say, you know, if she, what grade they put her in. But she always said, she said that she was the oldest one and the tallest one. And, so I don't know how many grades she went to, but she did learn how to read and write through the funny papers because she used to ask, "*Can you read this to me?*" And they finally got tired and they said, "*You know what?* [said matter of fact] You need to learn to read" and to read the funny papers she said that she learned to read and write.

[00:10:35] **Interviewer:** How old was she? When, when she was learning to read? You don't know.

[00:10:38] **Mary:** I don't know.

[00:10:40] **Interviewer:** Oh. I'm curious, when—how did your parents meet? Like how and where do you, did they ever talk about that or...

[00:10:48] **Mary:** Well, I'll tell you they never really sat us down or we never really asked them questions and stuff—at that—how do I put it? That, um, you never really stuck your nose into their business. [laughs] I mean, it was just wasn't that—you didn't, you didn't ask questions and they never provided answers. The reason we know sometimes when my grandmother or my aunt or some people would come over. They—people would stay late and my brothers would all go to bed and I would sleep in the living room and I would hear stories about what was going on and stuff like that. But they never, they never offered to us what—how they came over. I know my dad, I don't know how old he was. I mean, and, but he said, my mom said that "*They called him the lost son*". So. And my mom, I know we have pictures and we have paperwork of hers when they came over, but how old she was, I don't, I don't remember.

[00:12:07] **Interviewer:** Because I know Jesse, your brother—

[00:12:09] **Mary:** —Uhhuh.

[00:12:09] **Interviewer:** He told me that they met up, they met in Redding where they met.

[00:12:13] **Mary:** Right. That's where I think that's where they got married. And that's the story. That's about the only story that we know that they got married in Redding and they got married twice. They got married by a judge and then they got married by— through the church.

[00:12:29] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:30] **Mary:** Yeah. But, dates. No idea. Maybe Jesse knows, 'cause he's, he went through, you know, from the beginning to the end.

[00:12:44] **Interviewer:** Okay.

[00:12:44] **Mary:** Yeah.

[00:12:45] **Interviewer:** So, 'cause I, I heard that you had a really close relationship with your mom. So when you guys got older, so she didn't like, share any stories about—

[00:12:54] **Mary:** —No, no. Jesse and my dad were close and my mom and I were close, even though I was the only girl. [says, "even though I was the only girl" quickly then laughs] No. But yeah. Like I said, my dad would go to work, come home, he would sit

down and he would have his hot cup of coffee, read the newspapers, and it was time to go eat. And then he would go back and read the newspapers and we would do homework or clean or help mom with the kitchen and stuff like that and do homework. But, yeah—we never really we never had conversations, you know, about. You didn't ask. I mean for a long time I didn't know. I didn't know what, how old, I mean, my dad's birthday, my mom's birthday, their anniversary. We never knew.

[00:13:41] **Interviewer:** You didn't celebrate it? You didn't celebrate it?

[00:13:43] **Mary:** We didn't celebrate. I, and we would celebrate our birthdays, but, and then, well, like my dad, he didn't like sweets. So, my mom would make a cake and it wouldn't be no frosting on it [laughs] 'cause he didn't like sweets [laughs]. And that's the way I like my cake, you know. So, yeah. Yeah. We, they didn't celebrate their anniversary. They didn't celebrate birthdays or, you know, it, I don't know. It just wasn't done.

[00:14:13] **Interviewer:** It wasn't the way back then to do that.

[00:14:15] **Mary:**Dad ³was 12 years older than my mom and stuff like that, but, you know, she made sure that we celebrated the holidays, you know, and my dad always said, "*Oh, I'd like to go back and stuff.*" And, my mom says, "*I don't think so.*" He says. She would say, "*That the only thing Mexico gave him was his belly button*", which meant you were born there, "*but the United States was the one that has given you anything and everything that you have now.*"

[00:14:59] **Mary:** Where I know some people would say, you know, *I'd like to go back to Mexico and Mexico. this and Mexico that*, well, my, my parents never said that. They always said, "*Hey, you know what the United States and, and the United States has given, given, you know, your job, your kids, your life and every, well, everything that you have, there's no reason to go back*". Besides, even if they wanted to go back, back then, if you left a parcel of land and somebody came and squatted on there, [hand thumps table] that was theirs. There was—unless you paid somebody to take care of it, you know, and make sure that there was no squatters or what have you. You had, you had your land, but, you know.

[00:15:55] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:15:55] **Mary:** And so. And my mom and dad, the only time they went back to Mexico that I can remember, I mean, what they said was for my grandfather's, for my dad's father's funeral. And that was it.

[00:16:12] **Interviewer:** When I was speaking of Jesse, he said that you went with your grandmother to Mexico?

[00:16:16] **Mary:** Right. I went, she wanted to meet—well, my grandmother had her sister, so I was in—oh, that was in 64', I believe. In fact, I have, I have the paperwork, which my mom. My mom had to go to a lawyer and the Mexican consul or something like that to

³ Removed section for clarification based on Narrator's notes

write out that I could go with. They were going to give—they gave their permission for me to go with my grandmother to Mexico.

[00:16:49] **Interviewer:** And what was the reason that you went to Mexico with your grandmother?

[00:16:52] **Mary:** Oh, just to, to go visit her, her sister, because her sister was elderly. So was my grandma—elderly. So that it was just to visit. I guess kind of like the last time that my grandma could travel.

[00:17:11] **Interviewer:** How was that experience from going to the U.S. to Mexico? Because that was your first time, right?

[00:17:17] **Mary:** Right. That was—well, we went to Juarez. We went by bus and we—and somebody met us there, my cousins met us there and we stayed overnight in Juarez with some friends, all of my cousins and, you know. And we walked around and it was, [laughs] it was scary because there was this one great big, huge building cut. Seemed like it was in the middle of town and it was a jail, and it was aall dark. And one of my cousins says, "*You go in there and you're never gonna come out*" [laughs]. And I go like, "*Oh my gosh.*" He says, "*Sometimes you can hear noises*", but, and I go, "*Oh my gosh, the poor people.*"

[00:18:04] **Mary:** So, anyway, and then from there we took a train. Now the train, oh, that was an experience because it was like exactly a train, just like you see on TV with the cowboys and Indians [laughs]. They had the lights. Oh, we were like, I guess like in first class, because like every so many distance there was a bulb, a light bulb screwed into, that was first class [laughs]. And then what happened was I raised the window where I was sitting and it came crashing down and they said, "*Don't open the window. Don't open the window.*" And it was, it was exactly like the cowboys. I mean, it was an old train and had wooden seats, wooden floors. And we'd stop at these little towns that have people come on and there would be people selling food and their wares. And you look out the window, you know, it was kind of fun, really. It was exciting. It was really fun. And then we went from there—from we—from Juarez we went to Casa Grandes and that's where my, my grandma's sister lived.

[00:19:27] **Mary:** And then I had an aunt there too, that was one of my mom's sisters. We stayed with them and—it—they had a little store. And on Saturday, they would have the, everything was kind of like painted white, white, wall. And then across the street there was a big building. And then on Saturday they would project a movie on it [turns the paper in the notebook]. And that was kind of fun too, you know. And I—my cousins borrowed a car so they could take me around where—just different places. And then they said, "*Well, you can speak English to these people.*" And they were oriental. And it was really funny because they were speaking Spanish and there it was like like, "*Hola*" but they had their accent, an oriental accent when they were speaking Spanish. And I go, "*Oh my God.*" So, it sounded very funny [laughs].

[00:20:30] **Interviewer:** I'm curious about how do you, did your parents didn't really talk about their personal life, but, do you know maybe how they started working at the railroad? Like how did they go, how did they start their careers at the railroad?

[00:20:46] **Mary:** Well, [pauses] well, like my mom, I think she started like in 42' or something? Anyway, she wasn't there very long because it was during at least the second war. And the war ended, what, 45'? Yeah, so she was only there for, you know, just a little bit.

[00:21:09] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:21:10] **Mary:** And then she became—I mean—she stayed home then—you know.

[00:21:19] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:21:19] **Mary:** And then my dad as far as I—oh. He—before he became a foreman on the railroad. He was, uh, he worked in, uh, let me see [turns notebook page and looks toward notebook reviewing what she wrote]. I wrote it down, let me see. Oh— as a demolition person. Dynamite. Yeah. So he— mom said, "*You know*", that's, that's not a [laughs], "*that's not good*". So, he quit that and he went on the railroad, but I don't know what year it was. And when the war was on, he got deferred because he did work on the railroad.

[00:21:55] **Interviewer:** Oh, so, he didn't go to the war then?

[00:21:56] **Mary:** No, no, he didn't. He never served. But, he served kind of like, I mean, he worked for the railroad, so. He got deferred.

[00:22:07] **Interviewer:** Cause I know your, your grandfather on your mother's side, that he works for the railroad. Do you think that had any influence on your, on your mom or maybe your dad working for the railroad company?

[00:22:20] **Mary:** Uuuh, I don't think so. I, I think, you know, back then, I don't know what other opportunities there was for them, you know, for work. So maybe the rail, the railroad was it, [laughs] and I mean, I'm sure there was other opportunities, but it depended if you could read or write and, you know, follow the directions or what have you.

[00:22:45] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. So based on kind of, based on the photos that we have right now...

[00:22:49] **Mary:** Mm-hmm.

[00:22:50] **Interviewer:** I can see that there's a lot of family that, that was around you guys as you were growing up. Can you talk about the experience of I guess like the community, if there was any community around you, when you were growing up on the railroads, like in the different areas?

[00:23:08] **Mary:** Well there was mostly—they had a section like just for men that, that weren't married or even if they were married and their wives were in Mexico or, you know, someplace else. They had kind of like a little section, little hotels or little apartments that

they made for them and they were on one side. And then there was a family that had, oh, let's see, five or six kids. They had two boys and a girl that was my age and they never really came over to play with us. So, our, we just played with our siblings, which was my oldest brother and myself until my youngest was born.

[00:23:58] **Interviewer:** Was this in Pittsburgh or where was this?

[00:24:01] **Mary:** It was, okay. Well, there was in Thermalito and in Chico and in what do you call it, Pittsburgh. Well, we just played with each other. 'Cause all we had, it was just us two that I know of it. I mean, we were still small, but when we went to school, we always caught the bus and we never got to go to birthday parties or stuff like that, you know, 'cause we weren't invited [laughs].

[00:24:32] **Mary:** But I mean, you know it just we lived so far away, you know, where you actually had to catch the bus. Well, a lot of kids did that too, but they had—they lived in ranches and—but they lived closer to town than we did. So we didn't have little playmates. We had a dog. That was it [laughs]. And we had what do you call it? We had to make our own games.

[00:24:57] **Interviewer:** What games did you guys play?

[00:24:58] **Mary:** Pardon?

[00:24:59] **Interviewer:** What games did you—

[00:25:00] **Mary:** —Oh, well, I mean, it was like tag and hide and go seek. And I know—we, during—when the leaves would drop, autumn, we would gather them around and then we would have handkerchiefs and we'd tie strings on the handkerchiefs pretending they were our parachutes. Of course, they didn't work very well [laughs]. So we would climb the tree and they would come down, they'd climb it up and they'd come down again. And then there, in Thermalito on one side where the house was there was a biig, big, big hole and it filled up with water. And my brothers—my—Jesse at that time would tie, ties, or what do you call 'em? Railroad ties. What they call ties. He would make rafts out of it, and I wouldn't go, I said, "*No way. I, I'm not getting in that dirty water.*" So he would get in on it and he would paddle around, you know? Oh, and then couple times we would walk to the store and it was rather far. We would walk from our place that would, that would be from Thermalito. Well. And then—but there was a town of Thermalito where it had a little grocery store and we would walk down there and we would get a soda and then we'd come back. So it had—it was over a mile that we walked and we walked on the railroad tracks. We didn't think about the train. We just walked on the railroad tracks and my mom would go with us, you know? Yeah.

[00:26:36] **Interviewer:** How, because I know that your family moved from, from moved to a new, a few places from Pittsburgh to Chico to Sacramento and everything like that. I guess in terms of your home, which was a box car in a house, How close was it to other people? Was it relatively far or was it kind of isolated?

[00:26:59] **Mary:** The box cars?

[00:27:00] **Interviewer:** The box cars or the homes.

[00:27:02] **Mary:** Well, the box cars, like in Pittsburgh, they were—there were a whole bunch of them in a row. And the ones in Chico. [long pause] We—I don't remember a box car in Chico. I remember a house and it was out where, I guess the outer limits, is that's what it's called—outer limits? And, we lived there. And then the bus would pick us up and take us to—we would take a public bus 'cause it was like 10 cents or something, and they would drop us off in the middle of town. And the post office, the big post office would be on one side and there was a little park. And then on the other side, across the street there was the police station [describes with her hands where every building was located in the town]. And then from there we would walk to Notre Dame. And then when it was time to come home, my mom would give us another dime and you can either take the bus or you could spend it on ice cream like I did and walk home. And it was a long ways, now that I think about it [laughs]. Is a long ways from where we lived [laughs]. And I recall one time that Jesse missed the bus and he went across the street to the police station and he told him that, you know, *he missed the bus and he didn't know how to get home*. And the policeman took him home in a car.

[00:28:28] **Mary:** In the police car. And Jesse would just point out where we—where he lived, and he'd say, "Stop here." And it was still a little ways, and the policeman stopped and Jesse got out of the car and he ran to the house and the policeman followed him in the police car. And he knocked on the door and he says, and my mom came out and he says, "*Did you see a little boy, here?*"

[00:28:55] **Mary:** He says, "*I drove him and I kind of lost him*." He says, "Oh, you mean this one?" He goes, "Yeah." And, and she talked to him and he said "*Well, I missed the bus. So I went across the street and they brought me home*." [laughs]

[00:29:08] **Interviewer:** That's funny.

[00:29:13] **Mary:** So, yeah. So anyway. Yeah. And, like I said, we, we didn't have a whole lot of whole lot of [[indistinct words]], well, there was people, but there were grownup people. I mean even around the houses that we, that we lived at, you know, there wasn't any kids to play with.

[00:29:29] **Interviewer:** Even when you, when your family was in Pittsburgh?

[00:29:32] **Mary:** Uhhuh.

[00:29:32] **Interviewer:** There were no children? It was only like mainly adults.

[00:29:34] **Mary:** That—well, the pictures that I have—we didn't. You know—there. No [laughs]. I don't recall seeing any other kids. Of course, I was really young there. I think maybe, I don't know, three, four, maybe less. But yeah.

[00:29:55] **Interviewer:** It's really interesting that there was like mainly adults. There was mainly adults, like in the, I guess in the community. There weren't like a lot of children.

[00:30:06] **Mary:** There were old, they were, like I said, they were single men or either married men that had wives in Mexico. And those were the ones that worked on the railroad really. Or help, you know, with my dad. And there was one family in Thermalito and they had a house and it was like what maybe five or six blocks away from us. And they kept—they kind of kept to themselves and we kind of kept to ourselves. And, the people that we would go visit, [Interviewer opens water bottle, noise heard in audio] my mom's friends they had kids. So we would go like from Thermalito to Biggs and we would play with those kids. And there was like 12 kids, 11 kids to that family. So it was, you know, little steps going, you know, from the big kids down to the little kids. And we would play, we would stay there and at nighttime we'd play like hide and go seek or mostly, yeah, mostly hide and go seek, really.

[00:31:22] **Interviewer:** Would you play like in the box cars or?

[00:31:25] **Mary:** Uuuuh, no. Not, that I know of. No. No.

[00:31:33] **Interviewer:** Like the outside—

[00:31:34] **Mary:** —Of the outside. Outside. But not outside of the box cars. But not, not going in and out of the box cars [laughs] or like underneath or something. No. No.

[00:31:45] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. Your, your parents, they owned a restaurant prior to the railroad.

[00:31:51] **Mary:** Right.

[00:31:52] **Interviewer:** Did they ever talk about owning the restaurant prior to the railroad at all?

[00:31:58] **Mary:** No. I think my dad worked, still worked for the railroad. 'cause when they got the restaurant, maybe I could be wrong. But yeah. And so, and then they would help other people, my dad would bring other people, or he would, I don't know what you would call it.

[00:32:25] **Interviewer:** Like sponsor them maybe?

[00:32:26] **Mary:** Yeah.

[00:32:27] **Interviewer:** Okay.

[00:32:27] **Mary:** Yeah, there you go. Right. You know and he would write and say, you know, that "*They did have a job and they did have a place to live*" and so they could come over and work on the railroad with him....⁴What do you call it, when we lived in West

⁴ Removed one section for clarity based on Narrator's corrections

Sacramento, there was one cousin and then a son of his came over. And they worked, they worked on the railroad with my dad.

[00:33:05] **Interviewer:** Was it for a, a short period of time that they worked on the railroad and then they transitioned to a different job or?

[00:33:10] **Mary:** Uh,

[00:33:11] **Interviewer:** The only—

[00:33:11] **Mary:** Cousins—

[00:33:12] **Interviewer:** Yeah.

[00:33:12] **Mary:** The one that came over?

[00:33:13] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:33:13] **Mary:** They worked for a while and then they would go back to Mexico and go back. Kind of back and forth. Yeah.

[00:33:22] **Interviewer:** And where would they live? Would they live like?

[00:33:24] **Mary:** They stayed with us, you know. Yeah. 'cause even when we lived—like, before we got the house in West Sacramento, we did stay in a box car. And and my mom and dad bought a house, but it was a two bedroom house. And I kept telling her as I was growing up, "*Why did you buy a two bedroom house?*" [laughs]

[00:33:52] **Mary:** I said, you know, his kids were growing as we were growing up. And uh, and she said that. My dad says, "We need to get place because the kids will be going in school", you know, "*the school is gonna start.*" So it was kind of like, I guess we'll buy this one. You know, so that's why there was a two bedroom house and we were only there. We— I think the West Acres was like, I mean, yeah, Westfield School. It was Westfield, it was West Acres. We only, I went, I think about two years to Westfield School, and then I had to walk to West Acres. And then from West Acres you had to walk to James Marshall. So, and they said, "Well, we got, we got the house close to school." I said, "*Yeah, but you forgot how many years we were only gonna be there to go to school.*" [laughs] So, we did a lot of walking.

[00:34:52] **Interviewer:** You guys were very fit.

[00:34:53] **Mary:** Yeah, a lot of walking.

[00:34:54] **Interviewer:** I want to transition to your life, living in the box cars...

[00:34:59] **Mary:** Uhhuh.

[00:34:59] **Interviewer:** Because that's a very, like, interesting thing to say that your family lived, you know, in box cars, in homes and everything like that. Can you tell me a bit about your earliest memory you have of living in the box cars?

[00:35:11] **Mary:** Well, I've gone to the museum over here and we've seen a box car. I recall, we had a refrigerator, but it was a ice box. Ice box. It's an ice box where you actually put ice in the refrigerator to keep things cold. And then you had a wood burning stove. And I remember the green slats in the box car [moves her hand up and down]. I mean, the walls were all green. They were all little slats and they were all green and I remember the light bulb. There was a light, kind of like a string coming down. I wouldn't say a string, but anyway, it was coming down and you had one light bulb that you screwed in. And from there it was a little cord that you pushed or you pulled to turn it on, or else there was a little thing that you clicked and it turned on the light. But there, I mean, there was no chandeliers or anything like that on there.

[00:36:24] **Mary:** And then they had—we had like two or three box cars because one was the kitchen and the dining area. And then we had two, two bedrooms. And the beds were apart, I mean, on each side. And then you had where the bathroom and the shower was, and people. When I tell them that I lived in a box car, the first thing they asked was, "*When you went to the bathroom where did it go?*" I go, "*I don't know where it went*" [laughs]. I don't know if they dug a hole and it went in there or whatever. I says, "*You know what? I don't know.*" All I know, you flushed the toilet [laughs] and it went away.

[00:37:15] **Mary:** And then everything was wood. Everything was wood. What I liked was the door—the screen door. I told myself, when I get married I'm gonna have a screen door just like that. And, so. And the steps that, you know, it—we never really thought about, you know. Us kids living in a box car. We just came from school or. Or, we played and we just went up to go. It was lunchtime, breakfast time, dinner time. We went inside our little box car home and that's it.

[00:38:02] **Interviewer:** What was, because you said there's three there, so there's three separate box cars for, you know, the kitchen and the bathroom. What was like the living arrangement? So, did you guys all sleep in one box car?

[00:38:14] **Mary:** Mmmh, no. There was two box cars for—to sleep in because one box car was—yeah, I mean—you know, it was kind of like. It was like a little bowling alley just on the sides. One bed here, one bed there [demonstrates with hands where the beds were positioned in the box cars], and then the other box car had a bedroom in there, plus the shower and toilet.

[00:38:41] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:38:42] **Mary:** So, I mean, you couldn't put all of one thing [laughs]. I mean, if you had to, it was really, really, really close.

[00:38:51] **Interviewer:** And the kitchen was in a separate box car?

[00:38:53] **Mary:** Right. Yeah. Yeah, the kitchen. The kitchen was in a separate one. Like I said, it had the ice box. It had the table where you ate. It had the wood stove. And my mom would always get up early and she would fire it up and you know, to warm up the, the kitchen. So you get—you got ready to go to school, or.

[00:39:18] **Interviewer:** Did your mom, did your mom or your parents decorate the box car in any way?

[00:39:22] **Mary:** I remember this picture [laughs]. I think our—my Mexican nationality, they always took pictures of dead people in a coffin. And my mom, this picture here, they would put it up at the very top and it was, I believe it was a picture of my dad's father in a coffin. And my mom was dressed in black every, and there was another lady dressed in black and they were around—like taking pictures and she put one up on top and always remember I, if I wanted to go to the bathroom or so. I ran! [laughs] I never walked. I go, I always ran underneath that door, that doorway [laughs]. And I go, okay, I went to go do my business and I'd come out and then I'd run again! [laughs] Because, I never liked that picture. [laughs] But the decorating, eeh no, not really decorating. I just remember that picture up there. [laughs] To this day [laughs].

[00:40:38] **Interviewer:** Do you think there was a lack of decorations 'cause your family was always moving from one box card to the next?

[00:40:44] **Mary:** Right. Yeah, because I mean, you could only take so much. Only bring so much.

[00:40:49] **Interviewer:** And what were some of the things that your family would bring from when you went from one home to the next?

[00:40:55] **Mary:** Well, there was, I know my dad smoked and I have this little vase that you could put matches in. I have that . That was one of the decorations on the wall where you could get his matches [laughs]. That's about it. That's all I can remember. I, I don't remember pictures, you know on the train or inside the train or anything. They had curtains. My mom made curtains. She was a good sewer. And she made curtains, you know, for the windows and things. But, you know, other than your dishes, your pots and pans. I remember, we weren't living in a train, but in Chico [pause] when we were gonna move back to Thermalito I had a little rocking chair and that some of that stuff got left behind. And there was this lady, in fact, it was Johnny's mom who picked up my little rocking chair and we met her. She lived in Lincoln, and somehow our family got to go—got together, and she says, "*You know what?*" She says, "*I have Mary's little rocking chair, that you left behind*". And I mean, I was already grown up and she gave it back to back to my mom. My, my husband put it back together. He's really good, handy at doing that woodwork.

[00:42:35] **Interviewer:** Hmm.

[00:42:35] **Mary:** And he fixed it up and I have it in my living room now [laughs].

[00:42:42] **Interviewer:** Who's, who's Johnny?

[00:42:44] **Mary:** Johnny is this fellow here [points toward photos on the table of a teenage boy playing with Garcia children] that one of our playmates said, I was saying, in fact, he could speak. He, he spoke English and he could, he spoke, in Spanish. And one day he was hiding behind a bush. My mom was, was hanging clothes. And she said, "Johnny, what are you doing there?" He goes, "I'm hiding from my mom." He goes, "Why are you hiding from mom?" He goes, "'Cause she wants me to put. She wants to put me to work" and she goes, "He's over heeereee!" [laughs]

[00:43:19] **Mary:** But, in Chico, I mean, there was nobody. There were—there weren't any, any kids. And, and his father worked on the railroad with my dad. So that was the only kid that we had. I mean there was—I mean, we went to school and stuff, but you know, nobody came over and we didn't go over at somebody's house.

[00:43:44] **Interviewer:** I'm curious about, you talked about your mom once you would make breakfast, you would heat up the stove and it would kind of warm up the box car.

[00:43:52] **Mary:** Uh-huh.

[00:43:54] **Interviewer:** How did your family wash clothes? Do you know that process washing clothes, cooking food? Can you explain that process? As they were living in the box car, they're living in the other homes.

[00:44:06] **Mary:** I know she had a washboard [pauses and laughs]. She had a washboard and in Chico—an old washer, what do you call it? Like, you would see on TV, the old washers, you know, the ringers—with the ringers and stuff like that. But I remember—I mean—she didn't go wash clothes out at a laundromat or anything. She had a—she had a washboard. You know what I don't recall seeing, a wash a washer or, you know, a wash tub. I mean, she had a great big ole tub [gestures with her hands the size of the tub] and she would scrub clothes on the—on that wash board.

[00:44:51] **Interviewer:** A lot of hours spent washing clothes [Mary laughs].

[00:44:55] **Mary:** You know, I mean. Yeah, I mean when we lived in what do you call Thermalito. She had a washer, but it was, it was a ringer. And we hang—we would hang clothes outside. And to this day I do the same thing. I don't, hardly ever use my dryer [laughs]. I hang clothes outside.

[00:45:21] **Interviewer:** So she also does, Was there a sink then to also wash her dishes in the box car?

[00:45:26] **Mary:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They had running water.

[00:45:29] **Interviewer:** Oh, they did?

[00:45:30] **Mary:** Yeah.

[00:45:30] **Interviewer:** Okay.

[00:45:30] **Mary:** We had running water. It was—I mean—we didn't have to go outside or any place else to, to bring water in. No it was, like we had electricity. And, but it was still a firewood burning stove. I mean, you wouldn't think because of the everything was made outta wood in there, but they did.

[00:45:51] **Interviewer:** Was the box car wooden or was it like more metal?

[00:45:54] **Mary:** It was wooden that I could think of.

[00:45:56] **Interviewer:** Oh, wooden.

[00:45:56] **Mary:** It had like slats like that, but all the way up and they were green [points toward the wall and moves hands up and down].

[00:46:01] **Interviewer:** The, the inside and outside were green?

[00:46:03] **Mary:** Uh, no. Inside they were green and outside they were—outside it was a regular brown.⁵

[00:46:08] **Interviewer:** Oh—

[00:46:10] **Mary:** Brown car. I remember those green slats [laughs].

[00:46:16] **Interviewer:** And were there any windows?

[00:46:17] **Mary:** Oh yeah, yeah. [[undetectable words]] We had windows.

[00:46:20] **Interviewer:** Natural lighting.

[00:46:21] **Mary:** Yeah. Well, yeah. And then there was always, the door was always open. Especially, with the little screen door, you know. Yeah. We had that.

[00:46:32] **Interviewer:** And some of the photos, I see that there's like plants.

[00:46:38] **Mary:** Mm-hmm.

[00:46:38] **Interviewer:** So, there was. Little decoration inside of the home, in the box cars of the homes. Did your mom or anybody, did they have any plant or maybe do like a garden at all?

[00:46:50] **Mary:** My mom liked to garden. I don't remember her having plants inside [slowly speaks, "I don't remember her having plants inside"]. I know where we lived we

⁵ Clarified this portion based on Narrator's notes

always had plants outside in the front, in the front yard and stuff. But, I don't remember inside. She might've [laughs].

[00:47:16] **Interviewer:** Maybe you just forgotten.

[00:47:17] **Mary:** Yeah.

[00:47:17] **Interviewer:** You're like, who knows? In the beginning, we. You spoke a little bit about your father.

[00:47:23] **Mary:** Mm-hmm.

[00:47:24] **Interviewer:** What else would you like to, I don't know, say about him? I, I am seeing that he was like a very, like, you know. A very strong man, you know, very much a family man as well. Maybe he didn't talk much, but he was very present. Is there anything else that you want to share about your father? That.

[00:47:44] **Mary:** Yeah, you're right. He didn't talk much [laughs]. Yeah. Like I said, even though I was, you know, we had two brothers and I was the only girl, I wasn't close to my dad 'cause. I, well—I was always sick too. I mean, you know—I—and as I was growing up, I never knew what the color of milk. That was white because when I was sick they always put the medicine in the milk. It was either chocolate, strawberry, or different color. And I had to drink it....⁶ So, I was really close to my mom rather than my dad. Jesse was more close, you know, he was closer to my dad then. And then my little brother, I think he was 13 when my dad passed away so. He got a little bit of, you know, dad's affection and stuff. And—a lot of—after that—I mean, you know, my mom always called us, mi rey my king and then mi reina, my queen, you know, and she would always call us that, you know, to be affectionate.

[00:49:00] **Mary:** She—and then—oh, from Jesse when he starts school he stayed a year behind. I don't know if you know that [laughs]. He stayed a year behind because when we were growing up, and my mom and dad would always talk to us in Spanish and when he went to school. He knew English. [pauses] but he would do his homework. I mean, he would do the work in class and, and then he wouldn't participate. He would fall asleep and the teacher thought, you know, there might be something wrong with him. So he brought in my mom and my dad, and they talked and my mom asked him, he says, "*Why, why are you not participating?*" He goes, he says, "*I did all my work.*" His teacher gives me and in Spanish, you know, "I did all my work", he says, and "*They were talking.*" I said, "*I don't, I didn't participate because their language sounds funny.*" He goes, "*Ra-wer-ra-wer-ra, that's the way it sounds to me.*" And my mom said, my dad at that time said, "*You know what? We're speaking English to you guys. You're not speaking Spanish. If you wanna learn Spanish, you're gonna have to do it on their own. We're speaking English.*" And that's what they did. They spoke to us in English and in between themselves, they spoke Spanish. And that's how we picked it up. You know they, I think when we had to pick up, you know, bits and pieces, because my grandmother didn't speak English. She said she didn't speak English. But if you talk to her in front, if you were my friend and we're talking about boys, she would say, "*Quuue?*" you know, she'd say, "*Whaaat?*" And I

⁶ Removed section for clarity based on Narrator's corrections

go, "*Grandma, you know English, don't you?*" She goes, "No." I go, "*Yeah, I just said you did.*" [laughs] But she wouldn't speak English. I never heard her speak English, but I'm sure she knew what she—we were talking about [laughs].

[00:51:08] **Interviewer:** So, it was when maybe when, no, Jesse was like maybe seven or something?

[00:51:13] **Mary:** Yeah. When I was in first grade.

[00:51:14] **Interviewer:** First grade when your parents decided that we're speaking only English?

[00:51:18] **Mary:** Yeah, because, well, Jesse kept saying, "*Well, they sound funny!*" You know, and the teachers would give him, you know, school work, what to do, and you know, the work in there, he did it all. ⁷I mean, he knew, he knew English. I mean, he would do his work and stuff and but, everything else was just boring to him [laughs]. So he fell asleep, you know. And mom said, "*You know, that's, now we gotta, we had to do something with the other two kids or else they're gonna be like this too.*" So, they spoke to us in English, and we spoke to them in English too.

[00:51:56] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:51:56] **Mary:** But like I said, among themselves, they spoke Spanish.

[00:52:00] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. Can you go a little bit into the family dynamic? I'm curious, about the family dynamic [speaks a bit louder]. You explained earlier that your mom was, I like to use the word matriarch 'cause she was the matriarch of the family. Your father, one, a little untraditional, a non-traditional Mexican parent.

[00:52:18] **Mary:** Right.

[00:52:18] **Mary:** Yeah. he mean, you know, 'cause like I said, they had, especially Johnny's dad. He was very traditional Mexican person—man. And my dad wasn't. I mean he was—he helped when my mom get, you know, would get sick or stuff . He would cook. He made great pancakes, you know he'd make breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you know, 'cause she was sick and there was some other Mexican men that, you know, just wouldn't do that.

[00:52:54] **Mary:** So anyway, yeah. My dad—he, like I said, he went to work, brought—in fact, he brought the check. And my mom would sign it and put it in the bank or did whatever she wanted. And then one day my dad came, he went to the bank, signed the check, and they wouldn't cash it because they didn't have his signature on file. ⁸He says, "*What's, sorry, this says isn't your signature.*" [laughs] He says, "*I just signed it.*" He says, "*Nope, we don't have that signature.*" And because my mom would sign the check,

⁷ Clarified this section based on Narrator's corrections

⁸ Clarified this section based on Narrator's corrections

[laughs] so they would—they didn't cash it for him. So they had to go down and explain, you know, "*This is, this is his signature*". So they had both signatures then.

[00:53:40] **Interviewer:** Why do you think your father didn't follow the traditional Mexican role? Which is, you know.

[00:53:48] **Mary:** Well, you know what? He use to tell my mom, "*You're not the same person that I thought you were.*"They ⁹never argued, but they had their differences and different opinion or something like that. And he says, "*Oh, you're not the same one that I married.*" She goes, how did she put up? "*Well if you, if you hit a mule enough times, he's gonna come back and kick ya*" [laughs] Something like that.

[00:54:20] **Mary:** Anyway, it was like, well, times are changing and we need to change with the times. And you know, you work and I have, we have the kids and like he—like I said he didn't want her to work, but she says, "*You know what, the kids are growing up and they need, they need more things.*" So, you know, in order to stretch the paycheck or any—whatever. He said, you know, she would go to work and she would make him, or she would talk to him and that would make him see, but, you know, explain to him. It wasn't just, you know, "*I'm going to work and that's it.*" It wasn't like that. It was, you know, "*This, this is the reason I'm doing this.*" They talked to each other. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't all one sided. Like I said, he gave his check to my, to my mom and she signed it and she went to the bank and, you know, they cashed it for her, but they wouldn't cash it for you. [laughs]

[00:55:25] **Interviewer:** That's such a good story. I want to take a pause right now. If that's okay.

[00:55:30] **Mary:** Mmhm.

[00:55:30] **Interviewer:** So, we can take a break and then we can continue with the next section of the questions.

[00:55:35] **Mary:** Okay.

[00:55:36] **Interviewer:** Good. Okay, I'm gonna stop this.

{Takes a break for 15-20 minutes}

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[00:00:00] **Interviewer:** Okay. Awesome. So we're back. We're back after our break.

⁹ Removed a section for clarification based on Narrator's corrections

[00:00:08] **Interviewer:** One topic that I want to go into that we kind of dived into a little bit is, so your father, he would bring, he would bring his family over. He would sponsor them essentially to live in the U.S. and to work in the U.S. Can you talk about how, the experience of slowly seeing family members come from Mexico and live with your family for whatever period of time?

[00:00:38] **Mary:** Well, it was only well—my uncle in some of the pictures he's holding us kids and then his son came over and his grandson came over and like I said they would stay with us for about a couple of months or so. More like during the summertime they would come over and then they would go back to Mexico, and then sometimes they would come back and sometimes they wouldn't. So they did other work some other place. And then my—like you said, my dad would sponsor well, my uncle, his nephew and he would also sponsor some friends. Those people never stayed with us. They stayed someplace else. I don't remember.

[00:01:39] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:01:39] **Mary:** And, uh, wait. The last person that he sponsored that I can remember is when we lived in West Sacramento. He sponsored two, two cousins. And they came over and they stayed with us for, during the summertime and then they went back to Mexico. But other than that I don't recall other people. He might've, I mean, I'm sure he did, but we were still young enough and if they did, they were, they were friends. They weren't family.

[00:02:18] **Interviewer:** And I know your grandmother lived with your, lived with you, with your family. Do you know, do you remember when she came to live with you guys?

[00:02:27] **Mary:** Oh, my grandma?

[00:02:28] **Interviewer:** Yes. Your grandmother.

[00:02:29] **Mary:** Okay. My grandma lived with one of her daughter, one of her other daughter's, Aunt B. She lived with her because Aunt B had a lot of kids [slight laugh]. She had 12 kids or something like that. So, my grandmother would live with her and she lived in Sacramento and every year my grandmother would come over for—and stay with us for a couple of months. But, she never really, really lived with us. She came over to visit and she would stay like a couple of months with us.

[00:03:03] **Interviewer:** Mmmh.

[00:03:03] **Mary:** And my dad, you know like you asked, you know his way of dealing with family and what have you, he always—when my grandmother came, you know, he would pick her up from wherever. Sacramento or something. And he would bring her to the house and we treated her like a queen. Grandparents were top priority. We—she would come through the door, you would get up off your chair, you would give her a hug, bring in her luggage and what have you and say, "*Grandma, can we fix, can we get you anything?*" And "*Grandma, here's the chair*" and "*Grandma this*", and "*Grandma that*", you know. And that's the way we were brought up.

[00:03:53] **Mary:** Now on the other side of my family, my husband's side. [laughs] Totally different. Grandpa comes in and "Hi", [lifts arm up quickly and down] and I go, "*Don't you kids go give grandma a hug? Don't you kids and grandpa? And don't you kids do this and that?*" And they go, "No". And I go, "Hmm, boy, *is that gonna change.*" [laughs] And it did. [laughs] I says, your, "*It's your grandparents. It's parents' grand mom and dad*". I says, "*We always, we were taught*", you know, grandma 'cause that was the only grandparent that we had, you know or that we knew. And you treated her like a queen because she was grandma. I mean, you know,

[00:04:44] **Interviewer:** That's the way we should treat grandparents—

[00:04:46] **Mary:** —That's the way it was. You know—that's the way you know. And like you know our parents always said, "*You need to respect, respect the people around you and, and what the people have.*" In fact, my dad and my mom always said, "*If we go to somebody's house and they have just a box, a wooden box to sit on. You sit on that box and you take care of that box. Don't, you know don't, don't be squirming around or, and don't be asking for things.*"

[00:05:18] **Mary:** We—they make sure [laughs], "*Don't ask for stuff.*" If they say, "*Would you like an apple*" and we always looked at our parents. We never said yes. We always looked at our parents and our parents said *thank you*. They—you know, they would nod their heads, you know you can take it. And, but you never asked for stuff. You never, I mean, even when we went to the store my Dad always says, "*Don't touch anything*". [laughs] *You look, we're here to look*", you know, to the grocery store or any place. He goes, "*Don't, don't touch anything. Don't.*" He was always like that. "*Don't, don't, don't do that. You're gonna break it. We have to pay for it.*" We—this is the way we were brought up. And even now as, as a grownup, my husband and I do childcare at church [slight laugh] and the kids always go, "*Let's go get cookies.*" And I open the door and I says, "*What are we gonna do?*" (The kids say) "*We're gonna look.*" I says, "*That's right. We're gonna stand there. We're gonna look to see what kind of cookies they have. I don't want you touch, just look. And then I'll ask you what cookie you want.*" (The kids say) "*Okay.*" And they know. They go, they walk up to the table and we go, (the kids say) "*We're only looking.*" I go, "*Don't touch.*" I says, "*People don't want the cookies to be touched by little kids. Okay.*" Alright.

[00:06:43] **Interviewer:** Since you're bringing up a topic of church, I'm curious when you were growing up did your family go to church when t¹⁰hey were living on the railroads?

[00:06:53] **Mary:** Um, in Pittsburgh. Too young. No. Thermalito, we went to—in fact where Thermalito was, uh communion. So, we did go to church and I had first communion and I believe Jesse had first communion there too. And we did go to church. And Chico, same thing. We did go to church because we went to Notre Dame. That was a Catholic school. And in West Sacramento we did go to church 'cause I had—we did our confirmation there.

[00:07:29] **Interviewer:** And was it church in Spanish or was it in English?

¹⁰ Clarified this section based on Narrator's notes

[00:07:32] **Mary:** In English.

[00:07:33] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:33] **Mary:** Yeah. For Christmas Eve, we would go to—down South Side Park. There's a Mexican church there. The Virgen de Guadalupe, I believe.

[00:07:43] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. The Catedral de la Virgen de Guadalupe.

[00:07:45] **Mary:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:07:46] **Mary:** And we went there and my grandmother worked in the kitchen and they made tamales like on Saturday and on Sunday they would sell the tamales. So yeah, we went there every so often, but for the holidays, like Christmas Eve or something like that, or midnight mass we would go.

[00:08:08] **Interviewer:** I forgot about midnight mass [Interviewer and Mary laugh]. That is a thing. I wanna know a little bit more about, like, we've spoken a lot, I would say, throughout this time about your childhood.

[00:08:18] **Mary:** Mm-hmm.

[00:08:18] **Interviewer:** Earlier you mentioned a rocking chair. What, what were some other types of toys that, you and your siblings had when you were growing up on the railroads?

[00:08:28] **Mary:** Oh, I have a picture there [gestures to pictures on the table] that has a bike and it was a big bike [laughs]. I never did learn to ride the bike because it was so, so tall, so big. And it—Jesse did—he would ride it but he would have to jump off of it. And we asked one day, I go, "*How come, how come you only bought one bike?*" He (Mary's dad) says, "*Well, that's all we could afford and number two, so you could all ride it.*" And I says, "*Well, we didn't all ride it.*" [laughs] So, I didn't get a bike until I went to West Sacramento. My own bike anyway. And we had dolls when we lived in Chico. I got a doll. We went to store and I got to pick out a doll because I had—I was gonna get—have my tonsils out so I, I got to pick a doll. And then every Christmas I don't know if my brother's believed in Santa Claus or whatever, but I'm sure they did. And at that time, I would always go with my mom to go shopping and I always knew what the kids were going to get [laughs]. And then plus I got to pick out my own toy and it was either a doll or a stuffed animal. So I had all these stuffed animals all these dolls that I played with. And we had like guns. And, you know, squirt guns, and we played Cowboys and Indians. And, let's see. We had, we made, they had swings. My dad made a swing for us and we got the tire swing played on that. We had a couple of dogs and we played with those. And when kids came over from—other friends of my dad's and my mom's, they would bring their kids. And like I said, we would play outside. We'd play hide and go see. Or something like that.

[00:10:18] **Interviewer:** Did your parents ever talk about railroad safety? Did they ever give you any guidelines when you were playing outside?

[00:10:26] **Mary:** No [laughs]. In fact, the house in Thermalito, I mean—that was really close to the railroad tracks. I mean, couple of feet. And when the train would go by the house would—the windows would rattle. But I mean we played on the tracks all the time and there was no—they never said, you know, to—I'm sure they did, you know, “*Look out for the train*” or something, but the train didn't always come by. I mean, it wasn't a regular route for them. But, every so often there would be a train you know. Other than that, I mean, we—the railroad was there and that was it [laughs]. We played on it. We walked on it [laughs].

[00:11:24] **Interviewer:** I love that. That's very opposite from my mother. I want to transition to a topic of your mom.

[00:11:39] **Mary:** Mmhm.

[00:11:40] **Interviewer:** What can you tell me about her? What can you tell me about your mother?

[00:11:44] **Mary:** Well, she is a strong woman. She—like I said she took care of the house. Dad went to work and dad came, and like I said he gave her check. She wanted to know what—who—we were going around with to make sure, you know, you're in good company. And she would kind of rely on me [chuckle]. And so she would say, Jesse's friends would come and she'd say, “*What about him, what about his, you know, so and so, and so and so*” and I'd say, “*Yeah, they're good. They're good, they're good people.*” And they, a lot of 'em were from, they went to church to our, you know, the church in West Sac. And, we got to know, my parents got to know their parents. They were helpful. They were very helpful. Especially after my dad passed away. They made a spaghetti dinner and they donated that money to go to help pay the bills.... ¹¹

[00:13:44] **Interviewer:** You had a really close relationship then with your mom?

[00:13:46] **Mary:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[00:13:48] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:13:48] **Mary:** Yeah well, my mom when she was growing up too. I mean, [slight laugh] my mom learned—she learned how to cook. She was a great cook. She learned how to sew. She learned how to crochet, how to knit, how to—all different things. But in the process she had an aunt that, you know, showed her how to do all this stuff, but she was kinda kind of mean to her. If she didn't do the right stitch, she would, she had a broomstick, she would hit her in the head and then she would unravel whatever she was doing and start over again. So my mom got [laughs] she was real meticulous on what she did after, you know, when she was growing up. And like I said she did all that and then she said, she did say to me she did promise. She goes, [smacks lips] if, “*If I get married or when I get married and I have a little girl if she wants to learn. I'll teach her. If she doesn't want to, that's okay with me*”. Because of what was, of how she was brought up

¹¹ Section removed based on Narrator's corrections

with that aunt. And to this day, I don't know how to do a lot of that stuff [laughs]. And I'm sorry, but yeah [laughs].

[00:15:12] **Mary:** And, yeah, she—my mom—it was—she had a good sense of humor. She, yeah, she had a good sense of humor [smacks lips]. And, sometimes when, when we lived in West Sacramento, there was this lady that says, "*Oh, my daughter took me here. She took me to this restaurant. And we went to go to this restaurant and this kind of restaurant*" and my mom was getting kind of tired of that. And she would get frustrated and while she was telling me, I told mom, I says, "*Don't worry about it.*" I says, "*You know what we're gonna do?*" I says, "*We're gonna do the same thing.*" I says, "*I'm gonna take you to the same restaurant. We're gonna walk in. We'll either have a cup of coffee or just walk in and walk out.*" And then you can tell that lady that I took you to that restaurant. You're not—you don't have to tell her that you didn't eat there or anything. But we did go in and she goes, "*That's what I'm going to do.*" So if she had a problem with stuff she would kind of come to me and I would kind of—well, let's see, let's see—how I can work things out. And that's what we did. We, you know if I had a problem or a situation or something like that, I would talk to her and she would talk to me so. We, we were close.

[00:16:30] **Interviewer:** Did she ever tell you any stories about like her growing up as you got older or anything like that? Or it was kind of similar to when you were like a child and really just kept it.

[00:16:42] **Mary:** With my mom, no. She like I said, she was—they had six kids and she was the oldest and she was kind of like her dad's, dad's favorite. Well, she was the oldest. She was her dad's favorite. And after he passed away, you know, it kind of, she helped grandma or she helped her mom, Grandma, you know, with the other kids and stuff like that, that. But no, it was, after that situation, the whole situation was all different, you know. It was more like taking care of your siblings and what have you. It wasn't fun anymore [laughs]. It wasn't fun anymore. But other than that, I mean, no, she never really you know. She never said much about—you know—she had—she just took care of her siblings, you know—along with grandma—with her mom. Yeah.

[00:17:45] **Interviewer:** Okay. I wanna transition a little bit to the present.

[00:17:48] **Mary:** Mm-hmm.

[00:17:49] **Interviewer:** And it, past to the present. And I wanna ask you the question, how did living in a box car affect your life? Or what did you enjoy from it? It can be two-pronged.

[00:18:02] **Mary:** It never really affected us. I mean, when—. The last one—the last box car that we lived in was when we moved from Chico to West Sacramento. And my parents were looking for a house. We lived in the box car. You know we went to school and we came back. But after they bought the house, well that, I mean, that changed everything.

[00:18:28] **Mary:** I mean—you had friends, you walked to school with friends, you went to people's, friends' houses—homes. And they came to your house and you got to go to their house to eat, and they came to your house. And the neighborhood that we lived in had a

lot of kids to play with. I mean, you know, we played baseball, we played tag, we played hide and go seek.

[00:18:52] **Mary:** We sat on the lawn and talked to each other and the neighbors got—one neighbor would come out and all of a sudden everybody's coming out. Kind of got together at one house on the lawn and just started talking and they were talking about the kids and this and that, you know, and that, and then, like I said you went to—I went to three different schools.

[00:19:17] **Mary:** I mean, you know, Westfield, West Acres, and then graduated from Marshall. And that was more fun than living in the box car [laughs] because we didn't know any different. I mean, you know. Other than, from the box car, maybe to another house, you know. But, there, like I said, there was no kids, no, there were, there were no kids to play with. And you, if you were going to school, you got on the school bus and you went to school and you came back and that was it.

[00:19:47] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:19:48] **Mary:** And you just had your siblings to play with or a dog or something.

[00:19:54] **Interviewer:** Okay. I wanted to check in. We're coming towards the end. So I wanted to ask, what can you tell me about yourself?

[00:20:02] **Interviewer:** We're in the, we're in the present now, like, who are you, you introduced your name, but what's the, what do you want to share with everybody about who you are currently?

[00:20:09] **Mary:** Well. I retired from my job and I'm still working. My husband and I are still working. We work for a church and we're childcare providers. We never had kids, but I guess the Good Lord had something else in in mind for us [laughs]. And sometimes we have up to—we would have like 40 kids in two services, especially like Easter or Christmas or something like that. And one child, one time said, "*Mary, do you have any kids?*" And we said, "*No.*" And they said, "*How come?*" I says, "*Well,*" [smacks lips] I says, "*If we had kids*", I said, "*We probably wouldn't be here. How you know, taking care of you.*" Oh, I says, "*But you're our kids. You're our kids for about an hour.*" And I says, "*Then we gave you back to your mom and dad.*" They go, "*Ooooh, okay.*" And then they go out and play. You just have to explain to them [laughs].

[00:21:14] **Mary:** And then, my husband's retired also, but he still works. He's a kayak instructor and everybody calls on him to go and help out with different things: plumbing, fixing the roof, fixing, you know, doing this, doing that. And he always, he never says no, he says, "*I'll be there and if I can do it, I'll do it. If I can't, you know, I can't.*" And then with me like I said, I—we do childcare at church and I also did childcare for a teacher and they came over from Ireland and they're one of our good friends and the little boys—....¹² He just had a birthday. Well, he's—he'll have a birthday. He's—he'll be nine years old and his birthday's on Halloween and his name is Ryan. And Ryan always says, "*Pa can fix*

¹² Clarified section based on Narrator's corrections

aaanything." And, and his mother says, "Well, I don't want you to break anything so he won't have to fix it." But he said. "Pa can fix anything." [laughs] He likes Pa.

[00:22:27] **Mary:** And been married 47 some years¹³, house, car, friends. And we look after, we live in a cul-de-sac and we look after our neighbors. And some have passed away and now when we came in, we were the youngest ones there. Now we're the oldest ones there [laughs]. And the thing is, we don't know our neighbors because they're all new. They all go to work and you just wave to 'em. Where before, everybody would come out again out of their homes and talk to each other, you know? And there was—there weren't any kids at that time when we moved in. The old neighborhood isn't like it used to be. Things change.

[00:23:18] **Mary:** And happily married my husband there [gestures toward husband not present in the room]. He's kind of like, they say, I guess girls marry their dads or something, or something like that. He's very helpful. He's very loving. He, enjoys being with me [laughs]. We have a good sense of humor. I says, when I was looking for a partner, I says, "You gotta have a sense of humor. You really do 'cause I make a lot of mistakes." In fact, when he proposed to me he goes, "I'm thinking about asking you to marry me." And I go, "Well, when do you think you'll know?" We never said yes or no. Just, "When do you think you'll know?" [laughs] And then all of a sudden, in January we got married. He proposed in September. So yeah, he's a good man [sighs]. A good person. Hardworking. Couldn't do without him [laughs]. And we always—when we do something, he says, "Could you do this or could you do that?" And we always say, "Thank you" to each other. You know, it's just a little thing, you know, just, you know, we'll pick up the plate or something else and say, "Thank you dear." And do the same thing for me, you know. We listen to each other. Our opinions, our opinions count. We, you know, we have differences and. But, we bring 'em out and we go, "Okay, alright." You know, and then some sometimes I'll say something and then he'll say, "Well, you know, I don't know", about this, and then it turns out to be, I don't wanna say that I was right, but my opinion was, was a little better than his. He says, "You know what, I'm glad I thought about that. I'm glad I did it that way." I says, "Okay." [laughs] But we never say, "I told you so" [laughs]....Life is good ¹⁴[laughs].

[00:26:13] **Interviewer:** Life is good.

[00:26:14] **Mary:** Life is good [laughs].

[00:26:16] **Interviewer:** I think we're end it on that. Life is good. Thank you so much Mary for spending your time and energy to share your story.

[00:26:25] **Mary:** Oh, thank you.

[00:26:26] **Interviewer:** I really appreciate it.

¹³ Corrected 40 to 47 based on Narrator's corrections

¹⁴ Section removed based on Narrator's corrections

[00:26:27] **Mary:** I hope I didn't ramble on, but — [laughs]

[00:26:29] **Interviewer:** — if you did, It's your life, it didn't matter, whatsoever. I'm gonna stop the recording.